

Commander's Town Hall: Fires in JBLM Family Housing

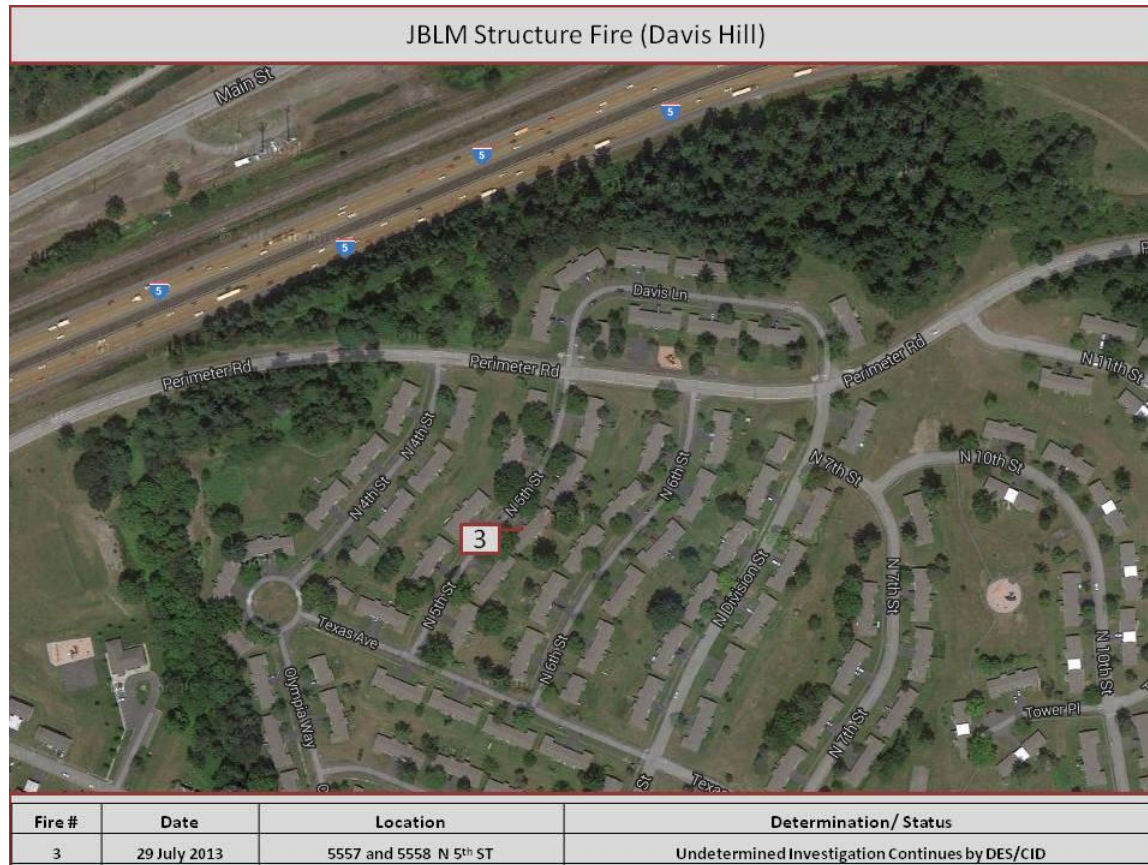


Conducted August 13, 2013, 6 p.m.; French Theater, JBLM Lewis Main

JBLM Structure Fires (Clarkdale)

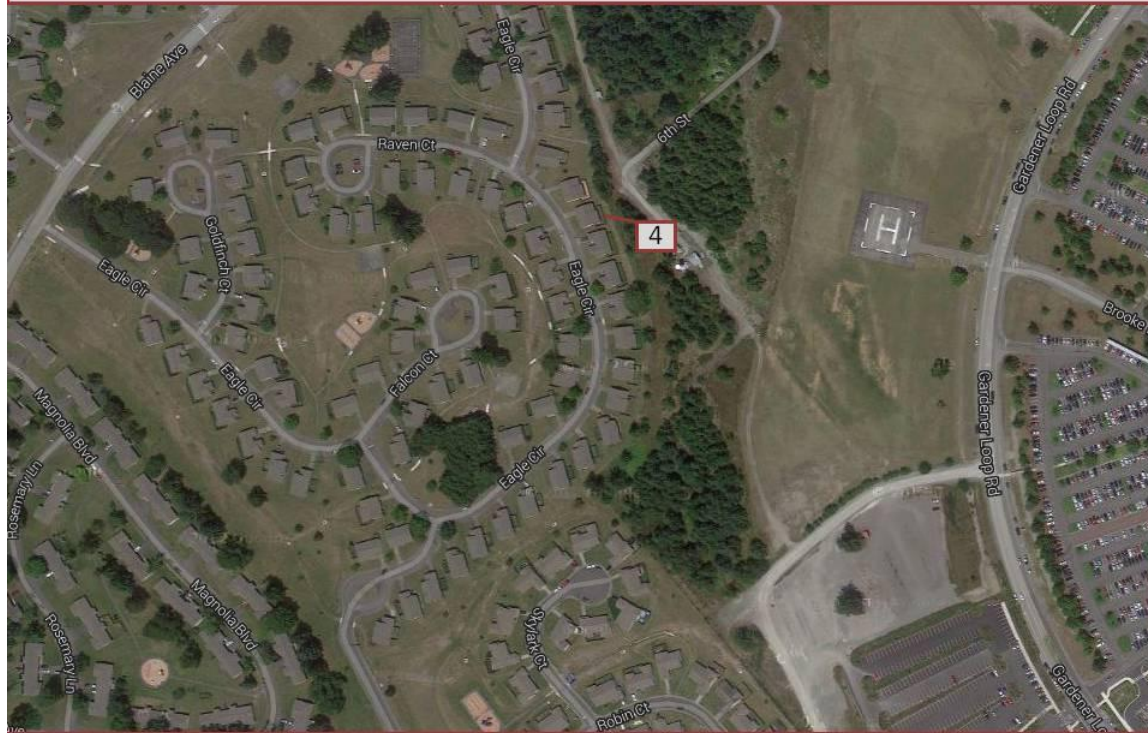


JBLM DES & other federal law enforcement agencies are investigating five recent house fires in Joint Base Lewis-McChord Family Housing. On June 9 and June 17, two fires destroyed four units of housing in the Clarkdale neighborhood. In each case the initial investigation resulted in a preliminary findings related to a possible cause.



While those investigations were ongoing, a third home fire occurred in the Davis Hill neighborhood on June 29. At this point, the investigation was expanded. In addition to JBLM Fire, Law Enforcement, and JBLM Communities (Equity), a third party investigator and federal law enforcement agencies were brought in to further investigate potential causes of all three of the recent fires.

JBLM Structure Fire (Evergreen)



Fire #	Date	Location	Determination/ Status
4	06 August 2013	9264 Eagle Cir	Undetermined Investigation Continues by DES/CID

On Aug. 6, a fourth home fire occurred in the Evergreen neighborhood. A fifth fire, in Clarkdale neighborhood, was quickly identified and extinguished by the home's resident on Aug. 8.

All five fires started in the carport of the affected homes, and all of the fires remain under investigation.

A letter re: the recent fires, and the ongoing investigation, was sent to residents of the affected neighborhoods (and via social media/email/website) Aug. 12.

This is the complete text of the letter distributed to JBLM residents:

From: Office of the Joint Base Commander

To: Family housing residents of JBLM:

Over the past three months there have been five fires in JBLM family housing. In response to these fires the JBLM Criminal Investigation Division (CID) has opened an investigation into the cause of the fires listed below, and CID has made significant progress in the course of the investigation. As your Installation Commander, I am writing to you to keep you informed and to ask for your help.

- **June** – In June we had two residential fires in the Clarkdale Housing Area, which is near Cowan Stadium. On June 9 a duplex was destroyed, and our initial investigation revealed the fire was likely caused by improper use of electrical extension cords. On June 17, another fire in Clarkdale was contained to the garage of a family housing unit, although the home sustained significant smoke damage. Our initial investigation revealed this fire was likely caused by a faulty appliance in the garage. There were no injuries in any of these fires, although several family pets were lost. Three families were displaced.
- **July** – On July 29 a duplex in the Davis Hill Housing Area, south of the Lewis Main Liberty Gate, was destroyed by fire. Investigation continues by the JBLM Directorate of Emergency Services (DES) and CID into the cause of this fire. There were no injuries in this fire, but several family pets were lost. Both families were displaced.
- **August** – In August there have been two residential fires. On August 6 the garage of a single-family home in the Evergreen Housing Area near the Madigan Army Medical Center caught fire. The fire was contained to the garage; however, the home sustained extensive smoke damage. Investigation continues by the JBLM DES and CID into the cause of this fire. There were no injuries in this fire, but the family was displaced. On August 8 there was a fire in the carport of a duplex in the Clarkdale Housing Area. The JBLM Fire Department responded, and the fire was contained to the carport. There were no injuries in this fire; however, there was light smoke damage to the home. One family was displaced. Investigation continues by the JBLM DES and CID into the cause of this fire.

Last week, representatives of the Directorate of Emergency Services (DES), Criminal Investigation Division (CID), and JBLM Housing met with me to discuss a way forward with regard to these home fires. I directed DES to consult with external fire investigators to look into the causes of these fires more fully. Their findings will be turned over to CID and federal law enforcement to assist with their investigation.

I am asking all residents to be patient, and not interfere in this critical ongoing investigation. This includes not speculating on the causes of the fires or the investigation.

In the mean time, however, I am confident the electrical systems in your homes are safe, and were not a contributing factor in any of these fires. The safety of the JBLM community is my number one priority, and therefore, I ask that everyone be vigilant and report any suspicious activity to the JBLM Military Police at 253-967-3107 or 253 967-7112. You can also call 911.

Town Hall Meeting:

My Director of Emergency Services and I will host a Town Hall meeting with housing residents tomorrow, Tuesday, August 13, at 6 p.m. at the French Theater on JBLM Lewis Main. French Theater is on Pendleton Ave. and 2nd Street. You are welcome to attend.

H. Charles Hodges, Jr.
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commanding



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Office of the Joint Base Commander

AUG 12 2013

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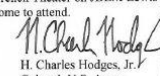
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“Your safety is my number one priority,” Col. Hodges told residents during the Aug. 13 community town hall re: the fires.

The ongoing investigation has not resulted in any indication that homes in the affected neighborhoods are unsafe, Hodges said. Prior to the recent incidents, the last total loss of a housing unit to fire took place more than ten years ago, in 2003.

While installation officials are unable to discuss the ongoing investigation in great detail, Hodges confirmed several individuals identified in the course of the ongoing investigation have been barred from the installation while the investigation remains ongoing.

Additionally, he stated that in-home electrical wiring has not been identified as a possible factor in any of the fires.

He asked for residents’ continued patience and cooperation, and that they refrain from speculating on the causes of the fire or the status of the investigation, which is still ongoing. Families in base housing will be updated when findings from the investigation can be made available, Hodges said.

JBLM Military Police have increased patrols in all neighborhoods, and urged residents to keep their eyes open for suspicious behavior, and to report any suspicious activity to JBLM Military Police at (253) 967-3107 or (253) 967-7112.



Q&A

** Are there any preventative measures residents can take to protect their homes? **

Items stored in the carports may have provided fuel for the fires that occurred. Residents of both on- and off- base homes are encouraged to inspect storage areas in and around their homes to identify potential fire hazards.

** Rules against storing household items in carports don't seem to be consistently enforced. **

JBLM Housing residential managers are stepping up neighborhood inspections/walkthroughs and posting notices for residents not in compliance with housing policies. However, this process is governed by landlord/tenant rights laws, and several factors can influence enforcement timelines. Residents who are unable or uncomfortable resolving neighborhood issues on their own can address them to their neighborhood housing manager, and residents who are unsatisfied with the resolution can contact the JBLM DPW Housing Office.

** Has the base considered converting the carports into garages, so that residents can store items more securely? **

There is a long-term plan to upgrade housing on the base over time, as part of the privatized housing agreement with JBLM Communities (Equity) - but there are no current plans to convert existing carports into garages.

** Many homes are not equipped with fire extinguishers. **

Residents are encouraged to purchase fire extinguishers for personal use, and to inspect them annually (and re-charge as needed) as part of their family safety plan. JBLM Communities (Equity Residential) will study the feasibility of providing extinguishers for single-family homes which are not required to have extinguishers provided, and which do not have fire-suppression systems installed.

** Can installation housing be designated non-smoking to reduce fire risks? **

The Town Center neighborhood was designated non-smoking in response to resident requests for a non-smoking neighborhood. There are no plans to designate other neighborhoods as non-smoking at this time.

** Can Military Police increase the number of patrols in neighborhoods, particularly on walkways or in other areas not easily visible from the street – including nighttime patrols? **

JBLM Military Police have increased bicycle and vehicle patrols in all neighborhoods. However, 100% coverage is not possible, and residents are asked to assist by remaining alert to possible suspicious activity in their neighborhoods, and to report any such activity to JBLM Military Police at (253) 967-3107 or (253) 967-7112, or call 911).



end of presentation

Compiled by the JBLM Public Affairs Office:

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